



House Minority Leader Lynn Finnegan  
Opening Day Speech  
January 16, 2008

Welcome to our state capitol and the opening day of the 2008 legislative session.

It is an honor to serve as the Minority Leader in the State House of Representatives. Let me take you through the journey that brought me to this moment in time. Seven years ago Governor Lingle, then the Hawaii Republican Party Chair, presented a vision for Hawaii's future and hope for those of us who felt that a one party government should be challenged. This inspired me to run for office. I believe a thriving democracy lies in a government that operates with at least two political parties encouraging thoughtful debate. This contributes to a more transparent process and results in better laws representing a greater number of Hawaii's people. I also believe that within this process respect can be earned even when values and views differ.

Fast forward to 2006. Linda Lingle did what no other governor in this state has ever done. She won every house district in the state; a stamp of approval for the positive changes and meaningful results achieved during the Governor's first term. We are working hard to answer the call of the people of Hawaii to continue to create opportunities and concrete results.

Hawaii Republican values such as opportunity, personal responsibility, and accountability are woven throughout our package. These bills address six of our state's most important issues: cost of living, energy independence, safe and sober streets, education, and ethics. I will be sharing with you just a sampling of the efforts that we will put forth.

The first issue is our cost of living. Two basic areas are food and housing. We are focusing our tax relief proposals on the elimination of taxes on food. It is that plain and simple. We want to make it easier for families to put food on the table.

For homelessness and housing, we want to see a Hawaii where every individual and family has a roof over their head. The reality is that it will take much more than just compassionate politicians. It will take compassion and an expectation of self-reliance and independency. For it is when we can lend a hand up to the next rung of the ladder that we will be able to make more room for those who want and need help. Our goal is to take the comprehensive services of the homeless transition centers like Onelauena at Kalaeloa and duplicate them throughout all levels of government housing assistance such as public housing, section 8, and affordable rentals. It is about believing and instilling hope in our people to break through the glass ceiling that keeps them from dreaming of homeownership. We want these programs working in unison for our people.

The second issue is energy independence. Our sunshine, tradewinds, and ocean attract millions of visitors every year. These same attributes can provide for our energy needs and propel us to the forefront of energy independence in 10 years. Driven by the rising cost of oil, the opportunities for renewable energy have never been greater.

The third issue is safe and sober streets. We are dedicated to passing increasing fines and penalties and an ignition interlock program for repeat DUI offenders to change attitudes and behaviors about driving under the influence and pedestrian safety. When it comes to drinking and driving, "Just don't do it". When it comes to pedestrian safety, no matter who had the right of way, no matter who is at fault, no matter what caused the accident, the consequences are irreversible, the ramifications are forever, and if someone dies, we all lose.

The fourth issue is education. One of the missing pieces in public education is the lack of a management audit on the Department of Education. Some will shudder at the thought of a management audit. I asked a prominent business man what a management audit meant to him. He

described it in one word, opportunity. It is an opportunity to identify something that your own eyes are unable to see. It is a method for quality improvement. The last time a management audit was done on the Department of Education was a lifetime ago, well almost a lifetime. I was three years old when the last management audit was done on the Department of Education.

We will continue to support Hawaii's Public Charter Schools because they are good examples of school level decision making. Voyager Public Charter School was faced with the challenge of insufficient class time to accomplish the teaching goals they had set for their students. A collaborative effort to add forty five minutes to each school day was achieved. This was made possible by the head teacher Miss "T" with the help of the Hawaii State Teacher's Union, the Voyager School Board, the parents, and was led by their principal. I bring this example forward because this is the kind of flexibility and ownership that I think teachers and principals can appreciate. It is my pleasure to introduce to you Ms. Sue Dueber, Principal of Voyager Charter School.

The next issue is good government. The way our legislature awards money to non-profit organizations has recently been questioned. Over the last 5 years the legislature has appropriated 200 million dollars in grants-in-aid. We support these appropriations, but are demanding reform of the process. We need to have an open book policy to the criteria and guidelines in which these non-profits are chosen to ensure a fair outcome for all non-profits. We invited Professor Danielle Conway-Jones, the Director of the Hawai'i Procurement Institute and a respected expert in this field, to assist us with a GIA forum to explore ways to create good practice procedures. Hawaii Procurement Institute was conceived with a vision to be a neutral, independent procurement think-tank and education institute.

Another good government issue is the creation of a new ethics committee in the State House with equal representation of both majority and minority members. Dan Mollway describes this as a good step in the right direction.

Finally, repairs and maintenance of state facilities has been a long time problem. The members of our championship football team and network commentators pointed out the dilapidated athletic facilities once again calling attention to the lack of maintenance of our state buildings. We have and will be appropriating millions of dollars to catch up on the long list of repairs. But how did we get to here in the first place? It has been decades of neglect. We need to look at ways to avoid this from happening again in the future. We owe it to you to plan, prepare, and preserve our state facilities and our tax dollars. We will be introducing a bill to do just that.

We also unanimously support Medical Tort Reform, "Keeping doctors in Hawaii" and the 2010 Constitutional Convention, "Trusting and believing in our people".

My words would not be complete without stating my utmost gratitude and respect to the military members and their families. The soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines of past and present are selfless servants who protect our freedom and our way of life. I know this well as my brother is a local boy who retired from the Army Special Forces and now works with the Youth Challenge program. He is also working towards a teaching degree to help kids in underserved areas. He wants to help high risk kids the way the military helped him. To our military, we will stand behind you and assist you in your readiness goals.

The Republican road traveled is a journey of many challenges and silent rewards but we do it anyway. We speak out on behalf of you, the people of Hawaii, and we play a vital role in Hawaii's political landscape.

My twelve year old daughter last week left me a note written on a napkin. It said, "Life is what you make it." That is exactly what we will do for you this session. We will make it the most we can for the people of this awesome state.

Mahalo and God bless.